

45:5-6 | JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021

# W|C|S

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

MIYAKE, KAWAMOTO, KANEKO, AND UMEKI  
WEBER | MEDVECKY | HALL

## Table of Contents

- 1 **Editor's Note**  
Muriel Harris
- 3 **Connection of Clients' Original Requests and Negotiated Session Goals in Hiroshima University Writing Center**  
Hidenori Miyake, Takeshi Kawamoto, Haruo Kaneko, and Riko Umeki
- 10 **Tuning the Violin: A Bibliometric Look (and Relook) at *WLN***  
Jessica Weber
- 17 **Book Review: *Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center***  
Craig Medvecky
- 24 **Tutors' Column: "Forms of Magic: Navigating Chaos as a Tutor in Training"**  
Gaelen Hall
- 28 **Conference Announcements**

## Editor's Note

Muriel Harris

The authors in this issue sought answers to a variety of questions about student agendas, scholarship, graduate writing support, and tutors' preferred tutoring strategies:

1. When students indicate what they want to discuss in a tutorial, to what degree are those matters covered in the session?
2. Is the number of citations in an article indicative of its scholarly importance?
3. How should graduate writing support be considered the same as or different from undergraduate writing support?
4. To what degree should tutors trust their instincts instead of employing recommended tutoring strategies?



The authors' articles may provide answers that are enlightening or may raise new questions in your mind that will lead you to write your own article.

When Hidenori Miyake, Takeshi Kawamoto, Haruo Kaneko, and Riko Umeki compared students' requests for what they wanted to talk about with tutors to the actual topics of the tutorials as reported by tutors, the authors sorted through the responses and offer their findings. They also learned that native speakers and non-native speakers have different tutorial agendas.

What factors determine the scholarly quality and importance of an article? Jessica Weber started seeking answers by turning to the practice of counting citations, assuming that more citations indicates more substantive scholarship. But as she thought through the subject and came to a different conclusion, she describes her intellectual journey and the conclusions she arrived at.

In his review of *Re/Writing the Center*, a collection of essays about graduate writing pedagogies, Craig Medvecky praises the book for looking into the complex question of whether there should

be separate writing centers for graduate student writers. As he summarizes the book's contents, he discusses both the need for such centers and the practical and theoretical bases for them. Galen Hall's Tutors' Column in this issue focuses on a question tutors are likely to ask themselves, i.e., do I tutor using only the techniques explained in training and in the literature, or can I rely on my instincts to select the right approach?

If your regional writing center is planning a virtual or in-person conference, please let me know so that I can include it along with the other conferences listed on p. 29.

### CALLING ALL TUTORS!

The *WLN* blog, *Connecting Writing Centers across Borders*, invites creative, academic, or hybrid pieces for their Tutor Voices page! Consider submitting a blog piece (1000 words) that takes a specific angle on an issue within writing center praxis and/or a 30-second video or photo with brief description about what's keeping you resilient during these challenging times. For more detailed guidelines, visit our submission guidelines page: [www.wlnjournal.org/blog/submission-guidelines/](http://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/submission-guidelines/). If you're not yet subscribed to the blog or our newsletter, we'd love you to join us. To do so, visit: [www.wlnjournal.org/blog/subscribe-to-blog-newsletter/](http://www.wlnjournal.org/blog/subscribe-to-blog-newsletter/). Questions? Email us at [writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com](mailto:writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com).

### GET INVOLVED WITH WLN

**Interested in serving as a reviewer?** Contact Karen Gabrielle Johnson ([KGJohnson@ship.edu](mailto:KGJohnson@ship.edu)), Ted Roggenbuck ([troggenb@bloomu.edu](mailto:troggenb@bloomu.edu)), Lee Ann Glowzinski ([lglowzinski@wheeling.edu](mailto:lglowzinski@wheeling.edu)), and Julia Bleakney ([jbleakney@elon.edu](mailto:jbleakney@elon.edu)).

**Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)?** Contact the Blog Editors ([writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com](mailto:writinglabnewsletterblog@gmail.com)).

**Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice?** Contact Muriel Harris ([harrism@purdue.edu](mailto:harrism@purdue.edu)).

**Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*?** Check the guidelines on the website: ([wlnjournal.org/submit.php](http://wlnjournal.org/submit.php)).

# Connection of Clients' Original Requests and Negotiated Session Goals in Hiroshima University Writing Center

Hidenori Miyake, Takeshi Kawamoto,  
Haruo Kaneko, and Riko Umeki  
Hiroshima University

Dialogue between tutors and their clients (students) in a writing center is important in order to determine clients' real needs. Consequently, "students are encouraged to participate actively in setting the agenda for how the tutor and student will spend their time together" (Harris). Furthermore, dialogue is essential for determining the direction of sessions and building good relationships with clients (Eleftheriou 793). When clients book tutorials through the online booking system of Hiroshima University Writing Center (HU-WRC), they have to explain what they want to achieve in the tutorials. Later, at the beginning of each tutorial session, tutors and clients have to decide their session goals, which are subsequently recorded by the tutor after each session. Interestingly, a difference between an original request and its corresponding negotiated session goal is frequently observed. For example, a client may request "to make my paper easier to understand." However, after the client's dialogue with the tutor, the negotiated session goal may be recorded as: "to check if the 'literature review' section is appropriately organized." Therefore, it is crucial for tutors to understand their clients' exact requirements and negotiate an appropriate goal for each session. To avoid misunderstanding, the tutors of HU-WRC are trained to set session goals in agreement with clients by adjusting the original requests and adding other points.

In this study, we investigated clients' requests and the corresponding negotiated session goals stored in HU-WRC's online booking system using KH Coder (a co-occurrence analysis software) and compared them to clarify the role of dialogue in writing tutorials. For this purpose, we asked two questions. First, what requests do clients make in the booking system, and how do these requests differ from the



HIDENORI MIYAKE



TAKESHI KAWAMOTO



HARUO KANEKO



RIKO UMEKI

real goals they intend to achieve? Second, do tutors incorporate their clients' real requests, which are found through dialogue, into their session goals? Clients of HU-WRC consist of native speakers of Japanese (L1) and non-native students (L2). Because clients are required to write session requests in Japanese prior to the session, tutors must carefully find the L2 students' real requests, which is sometimes more challenging than with L1 students. In this study, we focused on the difference between the negotiated session goals and original requests of both L1 and L2 students.

## METHODS

We collected 877 records that included clients' original pre-tutorial requests and the negotiated session goals written by their tutors after the sessions ended. The records, collected during the period from January to December 2017, were written in Japanese by 177 L2 students and 138 L1 students and 28 graduate student tutors at Hiroshima University. The collected sample contained many non-specific words, such as "first time" and "please," or emotional words, such as "anxiety." These words are contextually important, and clients' emotions should be carefully heeded. However, these words are not directly connected with clients' requests. Therefore, words that are not specific were removed before analysis. Four raters independently decided whether certain words necessitated deletion. Inter-rater reliability among the four raters was higher than 80%. The final decisions regarding deletions were made through discussions among the four raters.

After removing words deemed not specific and prepositions (*Joshi*), we selected the 60 most frequently used words for further analysis. Four types of data—1) clients' original requests of L1 students, 2) negotiated session goals of L1 students, 3) clients' original requests of L2 students, and 4) negotiated session goals of L2 students--were independently analyzed using KH Coder software (Higuchi "part I" 77-89, Higuchi "part II" 137-45) for co-occurrence analysis, to calculate the relevance of those 60 words. Then, a co-occurrence cluster of the words was drawn by KH Coder to categorize words into several groups.

Next, we named each category to reflect all the words included in the same group.<sup>1</sup> For instance, when "*Kakikata* (how to write)," "*Ronbun* (research article)," and "*Jyogen* (advice)" were categorized into the same group, the category was named "Give me some advice on how to write a research article" (see Table 1).

## RESULTS

**L1 Students:** For L1 students, one of the categories of clients' original requests contained the words "basic," "how-to," "teach," and "report," allowing us to name the category as shown in item 1

in Table 1. Since many of the L1 students were still in their first year, they were worried about their ability to write an academic report. Furthermore, the L1 students asked the tutors to check aspects of their writing such as its logical flow and comprehensibility. Thus, clients' original request (item 2) was named after "ensuring," "logic," "flow," and "sentence." Clients' original request three was named after "Japanese," "conveyance," "appropriateness," "research," "title," and "methods." Next, we named categories of negotiated session goals after words in each category. Interestingly, we found that clients' original requests one through four are extremely similar to negotiated session goals A, B, C, and D, respectively (Table 1). These results suggest that the tutors set session goals corresponding to original requests through dialogue with clients.

However, clients' original request five was too vague to understand what they really needed. We speculate that the tutors had to ask clients what they wanted to achieve in the session to set more clear session goals (negotiated session goals E and F). Clients' original request six does not appear to correspond to any of categories of negotiated session goals and seems too ambiguous to be reflected in session goals. In contrast, negotiated session goals G and H are more clearly defined. In other words, these categories of the session goals include more detailed content compared with the clients' requests. Thus, the tutors not only incorporated clients' requests into session goals, but also clarified their real requests by adding more specific words.

**Table 1.** Categories of L1 students' original requests and negotiated session goals.

Client's Original Requests	Negotiated Session Goals
1. Teach me the basic knowledge of how to write an academic report.	A. To learn how to write an academic report.
2. Check the logical flow.	B. To check if the flow is logical.
3. Check if my Japanese is appropriately conveyed.	C. To check if the content is properly conveyed.
4. Check if my discussion is understandable.	D. To check if sentences are understandable.
5. Check the structure.	E. To reconstruct the structure from the viewpoint of coherence or logical connection. F. To check if there is any logical leap in the purpose and background of research.
6. Give me some advice on how to write a research article.	G. To understand how to refer to previous research. H. To check if problems are described appropriately.

**L2 Students:** The categories of clients’ original requests and corresponding negotiated session goals used to classify the relevant words extracted from the sessions with L2 students are summarized in Table 2. Similar to the observation with the categories for sessions with the L1 students, clients’ original requests one through six appear to correspond to negotiated session goals A through F, respectively; however, clients’ original requests seven and eight do not directly correspond to any categories of negotiated session goals, although they are distantly related to all categories, suggesting that these requests were changed through dialogue with the tutors.

The majority of the L2 students needed to correct their Japanese expressions. This is demonstrated by clients’ original request (item 1), which contains “expression,” “correcting,” and “Japanese language.” Indeed, L2 students frequently asked tutors to check their grammatical or expressional difficulties. Additionally, the tutors needed to listen to what their clients said during the tutorials in order to identify their real requests or problems. This may explain why negotiated session goal A contains many more words, such as “grammar,” “check,” “Japanese,” “appropriateness,” “expression,” “understanding,” “writing,” “research article,” and “document structure,” compared with clients’ original request one. As indicated by their original requests, grammar correction was a critical issue for L2 students. However, in compliance with the philosophy of HU-WRC—which emphasizes cooperative improvement of texts in the session—the tutors do not correct or revise texts written by clients. Consequently, the tutors changed “correcting”—shown in clients’ original request one—to “check” in negotiated session goal A.

Clients’ original request six contains “instruction” and “how to write,” whereas negotiated session goal F contains “flow” and “overall.” Since the contents of these categories seem similar, the difference in selected words suggests that the tutors could answer the real requests of clients by offering “reader feedback on developing drafts of papers” (Harris).

**Table 2.** Categories of L2 students’ original requests and negotiated session goals.

Client's Original Requests	Negotiated Session Goals
1. Correct my Japanese.	A. To check Japanese grammar, expressions, and the appropriateness of the client’s research article.
2. Diagnose the written contents and if the flow is appropriately conveyed.	B. To check if Joshi (preposition) is correctly used and if what the client wants to write is conveyed properly.
3. Teach me how to use words.	C. To check if the structure of sentences is appropriate and their meanings are understandable.



4. Check how to refer to previous research.	D. To learn how to quote previous research and write a report.
5. Give me your opinions or comments concerning the difficulty of understanding and the lack of explanation.	E. To provide constructive comments and suggest improvements.
6. Give me instructions concerning how to write the research design.	F. To check the overall flow and logical connections in the research design.
7. Teach me the Japanese writing style in reports.	
8. Check if there are any unusual expressions.	

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we analyzed the co-occurrence of words in session records that included clients' original requests and session goals negotiated through dialogue with tutors. Because many of the descriptions written by the clients were too ambiguous to be reflected in the session goals, the tutors had to ask questions such as "why did you write this request?"; "what is the most worrying part in your document?"; "are there other questions?" If the tutors started their sessions strictly following the original client-written requests, the resultant session goals would not reflect the clients' real goals. Thus, dialogue is particularly important to decipher the clients' real requests/actual problems and appropriately set each session's goals.

Although the clients of HU-WRC have to input their requests into the online booking system, they may explain only parts of their requests in the booking system, or they may change their mind through dialogue with their tutors. Thus, the tutors added more detailed information in negotiated session goals E and F shown in Table 1, whereas corresponding clients' original request five is very simple. It is likely that the information clients input into the booking system may be ambiguous if they lack the vocabulary to appropriately phrase their requests. In addition, because the negotiated session goals were written by the tutors, they may just be using the language they have learned in their training, and the clients' requests may not have changed through dialogue. However, the data described here suggest that the tutors clarified clients' requests and appropriately constructed session goals. Thus, the tutors seem to offer their best efforts to identify what their clients really need or hope to achieve in their sessions. William J. Macauley Jr. notes that "for a tutorial, charting a course for the session means setting the agenda for how you (tutor) want the session to unfold" (2). We believe that the determination of goals at the beginning

of each session is one of the most critical parts of tutorial sessions provided by HU-WRC.

In tutorial sessions provided by HU-WRC, L1 students want to improve their skills to write logically enough for readers to understand their content (negotiated session goals B, C, D, and E in Table 1). In contrast, L2 students tend to focus on grammatical accuracy over logical consistency (negotiated session goals A and B in Table 2). It may be difficult for the L2 students to understand a native reader's perspective. Since the language levels of many of the L2 clients of HU-WRC are too low for them to anticipate the flow of a reader's thought, editing may be required in order to logically construct documents. Moreover, many L2 graduate students of Hiroshima University do not have sufficient time to improve their grammar skills because of the deadlines they have to meet to submit their master's theses. Consequently, the tutors have to help clients in situations in which they really require help to rectify mechanical errors. Thus, HU-WRC is confronted with a complicated situation. Half of the L2 graduate students have to write their theses in Japanese, even though the other half of them can use English. Furthermore, approximately half of HU-WRC's clients are L2 graduate students who are expected to write all of their assignments in Japanese. Therefore, at this time tutors recommend that clients find friends who "would be very likely to provide the vocabulary and grammar correction that the tutors in the writing center are not comfortable providing" (Meyers 61). We may need another system or another writing center to help the L2 graduate students correct grammatical errors in the final stage of writing their theses.

Grammatical issues are critical in sessions with L2 writers because "very few ESL students who walk into a writing center are likely to have such high levels of proficiency" (Meyers 53). However, Suzanne Edwards instructs tutors "not to edit the paper for mechanical errors. This includes finding or labeling the spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes in a paper" (8). Therefore, HU-WRC tutors show the L2 writers what is wrong with their texts rather than correcting the errors for them. For example, tutors show clients what a particular sentence really means by using example sentences or drawing pictures. Sometimes, tutors show alternative choices to correct mistakes for particular situations, allowing clients to learn quickly. Since it is difficult for L2 writers to construct sentences without hints, example sentences help these clients construct additional contextually identical sentences.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that the tutors of HU-WRC managed to set session goals corresponding to the original

requests clients inputted into the booking system. The session goals were similar to but clearer and more specific than clients' original requests. L1 students tend to ask their tutors to check logical flow and comprehensibility of their reports, whereas L2 students need to correct their grammatical errors and Japanese expressions. Thus, the process by which tutors and clients negotiate session goals through dialogue is really important because they have to set session goals that meet the policy of HU-WRC. However, in this study, we only used session records registered in the booking system and did not record real dialogue between tutors and clients. Our study will be helpful in empirically supporting the importance of dialogue early in the session and the kind of words or ideas that are effective to negotiate with clients on session goals.

## NOTE

1. Although English translations "how to write" and "research article" are not single words, the original Japanese words "Kakikata" and "Ronbun" are single words. Sometimes it is not easy to explain a Japanese word by using a single English word.



## WORKS CITED

- Edwards, Suzanne. "Tutoring Your Tutors: How to Structure a Tutor-Training Workshop." *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 7 no. 10, 1983, pp. 7-9.
- Eleftheriou, Maria. "Western Pedagogical Models of Writing Center Tutorials: Can They Be Effective in the Middle East?" In 1st International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, *FLTAL 2011 Proceedings Book 1*, 2011, pp. 790-96.
- Harris, Muriel. "The Concept of a Writing Center." *National Writing Project*. <https://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/the-concept-of-a-writing-center/>.
- Higuchi, Koichi. "A Two-Step Approach to Quantitative Content Analysis: KHCoder Tutorial Using *Anne of Green Gables* (part I)." *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2016, pp. 77-91.
- . "A Two-Step Approach to Quantitative Content Analysis: KHCoder Tutorial Using *Anne of Green Gables* (part II)." *Ritsumeikan Social Science Review*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2017, pp. 137-47.
- Macauley, William J. "Setting the Agenda for the Next 30 Minutes." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, edited by Ben Rafoth, 2nd ed., Heinemann, 2005, pp. 1-8.
- Meyers, Sharon A. "Reassessing The 'Proofreading Trap': ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 24, no.1, 2003, pp. 51-70.
- Newman, Mark E. J., and Girvan, Michelle. "Finding and Evaluating Community Structure in Networks." *Physical Review E*, vol. 69, 2004, doi: 10.1103/PhysRevE.69.026113.

# Tuning the Violin: A Bibliometric Look (and ReLook) at *WLN*

Jessica Weber

Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia Writing Center



## INTRODUCTION 1.0

While in the quantitative portion of a graduate research methods course, I came across a claim that scientific journals' scholarliness could be measured by the number of citations in their articles (Ucar et al. 1855). Having worked alongside economic researchers for five years, I had begun to quantify . . . everything. Though most of the bibliometric work I found was related to the sciences, I was particularly interested in the idea that a good indicator of evolving scholarship is that the number of references per article should double after about thirty years (Milojević 6).

This sort of bibliometric work is not unheard of within the writing center field. In 2014, Neal Lerner studied the citation practices of authors published in *Writing Center Journal (WCJ)* between 1980 and 2009. He felt this data set could demonstrate the knowledge domain of a field or journal and also allow scholars' intellectual work to join larger conversations (72). Lerner did, in fact, find that "the average number of citations per article in 2009 (21.3) was nearly double the average in 1980 (11.6)" (78). Perhaps this is to be expected, given the limited research available in 1980. But his research goes one step further, raising the concern that writing center scholars have not done enough to cite a diverse array of resources and to cite outside of our (small, sometimes exclusive) discipline (70). Equipped with all the enthusiasm and naivety of a graduate student hoping to finish the essay *before* spring break, I focused on the first part of this analysis: I wanted to know if *WLN*, too, had doubled the number of citations per article over about a thirty-year period.

## METHODS 1.0

Armed with the idea that intellectual worth could be measured simply by counting up citations,<sup>1</sup> I set off to do the same with *WLN*'s archive. I limited the remarkable volume of *WLN* to a sample that included the first issue of each year. I counted up the number of

works cited in each article, then found the average citations per article for each issue. Because the number of works cited varied widely between articles and issues overall, I condensed the data to five-year periods to better reveal trends. “Tutor’s Column” articles were excluded from my sample. Though these columns do the important work of featuring new (typically undergraduate) voices, at the time I felt that contributions from directors and administrators were a better example of professional writing in the field—or at least more comparable to the articles Lerner had included.

## RESULTS 1.0

Across each year of *WLN*, the average number of works cited per article generally trends upward. Because so many early issues cite no other materials at all (which makes sense, given it was the field’s first periodic resource), it may be problematic to look for the same doubling of citations within a thirty-year period in the way Lerner did with *WCJ*. In the most recent five-year period available for *WLN* (Volumes 36-42), the average number of works cited per article was 7.61, while the period thirty years prior (Volumes 8-14) was only 0.9 works cited per article. True, the number of citations has much more than doubled—but this data isn’t telling the whole story. It felt discouraging, at first, to see that *WLN*’s citation practices looked meager in comparison to *WCJ*’s. Under the first set of *WCJ* editors (North and Brannon, 1980-1984), articles cited an average of 11.6 works—still above the average number that *WLN* authors have finally risen to today (Lerner 79). Perhaps I was looking at this all wrong; instead, I needed to consider what these citation practices should mean to *WLN*’s readers and contributors, as well as what these data could indicate in terms of how both *WLN* and *WCJ* may differ in their creation of knowledge. To better understand these differences, I knew I needed to step back and look at *WLN*’s unique history and context.

## INTRODUCTION 2.0

For over forty years, *WLN* has served as a space to exchange ideas and resources within the writing center community. Over time, the journal itself has embraced more standardized formatting and subscription options, in part to reflect the field’s goals of professionalization (Phelan and Weber). The name change to *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* in Volume 40 is also a reflection of the increasingly scholarly work published. But to really understand the trends in *WLN*’s archives, I went back to the source—fortunately, Muriel Harris has always been (and continues to be) a gracious resource.

*Writing Lab Newsletter* was born from a sheet of paper that Harris

passed around at a conference session on writing centers. In its earliest editions, *WLN* is simply a compilation of materials that were provided to Harris, who then sent them out to her small list of subscribers. Sent them out, of course, by mail—with no listservs or email addresses to turn to. “Imagine, if you can,” Harris wrote to me, “taking a job where there’s almost nothing to read about the job you have taken.” This job was helping to found the now-widely-recognized Writing Lab at Purdue University. Years later, Harris wrote that first-time writing center directors often felt “we were playing a violin while constructing it” (136). I love this origin story because it shows that *WLN* has always tried to be exactly what writing center professionals needed at different points in its history. It began as a simple newsletter, reaching readers hungry for contact with anyone in the same challenging position. But Harris also acknowledged that “after 40 years, the publication had long since stopped being just a ‘newsletter.’” It is now peer-reviewed, featuring award-winning scholarship, and the new name reflects that—while still including a nod to the original lifeline Harris created.

Perhaps, in light of this journal’s history, it is neither fair nor productive to compare *WLN* and *WCJ*. As the pioneering publication in our field, *WLN* sought first and foremost to serve as a knowledge hub and a point of connection. *WCJ*, which began a few years later, was then able to step in as a peer-reviewed journal in the field. As a writing center scholar with ten years of experience—from an undergraduate writing tutor to a director of a workplace writing center—I can say that I have used both publications to great advantage. One thing that stands out about *WLN* is the way its format is still designed to best serve writing center directors, who often find themselves struggling for resources (in time, funding, or training). *WLN*’s short issues, and the limited word count of each article (3000, including works cited) may be a reason for fewer cited sources. But Harris elaborated in her email: “the format of *WLN* is in response to readers’ preference for shorter, more tightly focused articles.” Not only this, but shorter issues mean reduced printing and mailing costs, which keep the cost of a subscription low. Expanded issues, Harris suspects, “would not be beneficial to directors of writing centers who have very tight budgets,” and they would likely not be read cover-to-cover the way that shorter issues are. Even now as a peer-reviewed journal, *WLN* is still meeting writing center directors where they are, providing them with affordable, frequent touch points throughout the academic year. The “Tutors’ Column” also gives directors an opportunity to encourage their own staff—frequently undergraduates—to develop and contribute their own voices. Shorter issues make these columns stand out in ways that they otherwise may not in a heftier compilation.

So while citation practices can be valuable at times, it was short-sighted for me to simply count and compare. We need to look at what these practices mean for the ways we generate, share, value, and credit knowledge and knowledge-makers. In his 2014 article, Lerner brings up Terry Riley's "The Unpromising Future of Writing Centers," which presents a grim prediction of the field's fixation on "permanence and respect" (Riley qtd. in Lerner 69). I had the privilege of taking a course on British Romanticism with Dr. Riley in 2009. I wasn't initially excited by the syllabus, but I found myself listening, spellbound, along with the whole class, when Dr. Riley would read his most adored poems aloud. When I think of him, it is the version that stood in a classroom of Bakeless Hall, when ivy still clung to the building, reading T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." My dismissal of poetry melted as he delightedly paused to draw our attention to the yellow-fog cat he loved, voice catching and eyes tear-sparkled when he asked, earnestly, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" I didn't know, at the time, that he had once led the same writing center where I was then a tutor. A few years later, when I stumbled across "The Unpromising Future of Writing Centers," which he'd published almost thirty years prior, I remember feeling somewhat betrayed. *Unpromising?* This seemingly magic space where I loved to work and which I hoped to make into a career—*Unpromising?*

I've spent a lot of time reckoning with that article since. When Lerner brought it up, it was to echo Riley's concern that our discipline may become so focused on conventional scholarship and that we would become too insular, losing our sense of interdisciplinarity and inclusiveness. He feared the loss of the exact "energy" that had drawn me to writing center work as an undergraduate: an energy "derive[d] from what we have left of happy amateurism, and from our sense of being in transition, our extroversion of purpose, and our interdisciplinarity" (31). Riley, here, is speaking more specifically to interdisciplinarity, but I would argue that a similar energy can be forged through collaboration even within a discipline. In his *WCJ* study, Lerner focused on how frequently authors have cited particular articles and how frequently authors have collaborated as opposed to contributing solo-authored works. Ultimately, he concludes that *WCJ*'s citation practices have mimicked the exclusivity that Riley found "unpromising," particularly in the ways they mostly cite other *WCJ* articles and tend to write, ostensibly, alone.

It's easy to see some diminishing features of "happy amateurism" (Riley 31) as you move through *WLN* chronologically. Fewer issues now include direct appeals for help, amusing cartoons, or, yes, snack

recipes for tutor training meetings. If not the most *professional* features, they still served the important role of connecting scholars around the world. If directors had felt they were creating their own violins, now at least there were performances to observe, techniques to learn, music to love. I wonder if Riley’s fears would have been at all assuaged by the WCenter listserv, which now constantly buzzes with ideas, appeals, and humor. With WCenter serving as a channel for freely exchanged ideas, *WLN* is free to focus on tightly-written, scholarly articles that are rigorously peer-reviewed.

With this evolving context in mind, I became interested in challenging “unpromising,” by investigating whether *WLN* contributors, too, had become more insular or more inclusive. I returned to the *WLN* archives, but this time I wanted to look at how collaborative authors have been. In the past, I’ve heard professors hint at the prestige of solo-authoring. But our work extols the collaborative nature of writing and revision; if we are to stay true to ourselves as a discipline, our own scholarship should reflect that.

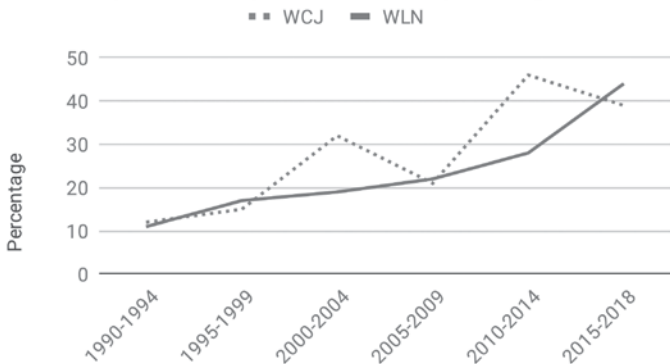
## METHODS 2.0

Lerner calculated the percentages for *WCJ*’s single-authored and multiple-authored articles and grouped them into five-year increments between 1990 and 2009. To replicate his study, I first followed his methods and extended his calculations for the years 2010-2018. I then performed a similar procedure for *WLN*, using every volume from 1990-2018. I again excluded the *WLN* “Tutor’s Column” articles from my sample, simply to keep my data consistent; I also excluded any notes from the editor, book reviews, informal articles such as lists, and a recipe.

## RESULTS 2.0

Resulting data reveal that multiple-authored articles have become more common over time in both publications.

**Figure 1:** A Comparison of Multiple-Authored Works by Percentage in Archives





Across periods of time, a greater proportion of collaborative articles has appeared in either *WCJ* or *WLN*. But I do see a promising trend for *WLN*: articles have become increasingly and consistently more collaborative, with an even sharper collaborative turn in the last five years. There could be a number of reasons for this trend, but I think the spirit of outreach that initially spurred the journal's creation has continued. Many of these collaborative works have emerged from friendships and partnerships forged at regional and international conferences, as well as through connections made online.

Though I excluded the "Tutors' Column," it's important to acknowledge this feature of *WLN* as inherently interdisciplinary. So many writing center tutors come from diverse disciplines, yet *WLN* still gives them a space to share their knowledge. I think this must have pleased Riley, who neared the end of his article with suggestions to "Let last year's tutors handle the training. Allow that students may know what they need better than we do" (32). The field needs research diving into the interdisciplinarity of *WLN*'s citation practices, and/or what the inclusion of student voices means.

## CONCLUSION

I don't mean to frame the journals' rates of collaborative articles as any kind of competition. I merely point it out as a way we can truly distinguish *WLN* and continue to capture the collaborative energy that propels the pulse of writing centers. One violin (especially the first!) is impressive; two and then three can create harmonies that were previously unimaginable. We've long combated the cliché of the solitary writer. We teach our students about the "conversation of mankind," and we encourage them to listen as well as they speak (Bruffee). Lerner, too, points out that solo contributions stand in contrast to the collaborative nature of our work (73). Our authorship can demonstrate this. We need to continue to proactively reach out to others in the field and collaborate.

Two major events have happened since I first drafted this article. First, Dr. Riley, whose love for poetry I found so endearing and whose article spurred me toward this research, passed away in the fall of 2019. The second is that, as I write this line in the spring of 2020, I am quarantined during the COVID-19 pandemic—and through the WCenter listserv and my own experience, I have witnessed a nearly overnight shift of writing centers to all-online operations. I am not leaning into cold, hard data to reassure myself, the way I did when I began investigating citations. I am coping by watching videos of Spanish police officers playing violin in the street, trying to provide a point of connection to so many people isolated in their homes.

Now, more than ever, it's time to collaborate, to reach from our own little corners out to others'. We can solve problems the same way that we encourage our tutors to reach out to one another when they encounter difficult moments. We have an opportunity to move toward a future where our scholarship truly reflects our practice: diverse, collaborative, meaning-making, seeking, resilient. That's the energy that drew me to the work, and that's what keeps me here.

## NOTE

1. Though Lerner, I see now, is quick to point out that he is *not* critiquing "the quality of scholarship that has appeared in *WCJ*" (69).



## WORKS CITED

- Eliot, T. S. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, June 1915, pp. 130-35.
- Harris, Muriel. "Open Admissions and the Construction of a Writing Center History: A Tale of Three Models." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1997, pp. 134-40, [www.jstor.org/stable/43442026](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43442026).
- Lerner, Neal. "The Unpromising Present of Writing Center Studies: Author and Citation Patterns in *The Writing Center Journal*, 1980 to 2009." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2014, pp. 67-102.
- Milojević, Staša. "How Are Academic Age, Productivity, and Collaboration Related to Citing Behaviors of Researchers?" *PLOS ONE*, vol. 7, no. 11, 2012, pp. 1–13.
- Phelan, Molly, and Jessica Weber. "Our Documented Growth as a Field and Community: An Analysis of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*." *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, 2013, [https://wlnjournal.org/studies\\_phelan.pdf](https://wlnjournal.org/studies_phelan.pdf).
- Riley, Terrance. "The Unpromising Future of Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, pp. 20-34.
- Ucar, Iñaki, et al. "Growth in the Number of References in Engineering Journaling Papers During the 1972-2013 Period." *Scientometrics*, vol. 98, 2013, pp. 1855–64.

## CALL FOR GUEST EDITORS

The WLN Editorial Staff will gladly offer support to guest editors in proposing and curating thematic special issues of WLN, WLN Digital Edited Collections (DECs), or both. If you're interested in the possibility of guest editing either a special issue, a DEC, or both, contact Muriel Harris ([harrism@purdue.edu](mailto:harrism@purdue.edu)).

## Review: *Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center*

Reviewed by Craig Medvecky  
Loyola University Maryland

*Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center*, edited by Susan Lawrence and Terry Myers Zawacki. Utah State UP, 2019. \$34.95.

Readers of Susan Lawrence and Terry Myers Zawacki's *Re/Writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center* will encounter a collection of essays engaged with the contemporary development of graduate writing centers. Balancing theory and practice with a mix of research-driven and narrative styles, the authors articulate and grapple with the field's most pressing issues. Paula Gillespie's prologue sets the stage with the exhortation that today's writing centers must do more for their graduate students than simply include them in the undergrad peer tutoring model. Subsequently, contributors unpack the ways in which graduate-level peer tutoring exists as a fundamentally different enterprise than undergraduate peer tutoring. While the assertion of difference is not revolutionary in itself, only recently have these differences come to the surface in our conferences with some rigor. As a result, this particular volume feels very much needed *right now* owing to its sustained, intensive, research-based exploration of these themes by many of the leading thinkers in our field (Michael Pemberton, Gillespie, Steve Simpson, Michelle Cox, Joanna Wolfe, Sherry Wynn Perdue, etc.). There are still too few book-length resources specifically for graduate writing centers. Steve Simpson et al.'s *Supporting Graduate Student Writers* comes to mind, but Lawrence and Zawacki's collection focuses solely on the graduate writing center, whereas Simpson, et al. reach across the university, making these two books well-suited companions.

Lawrence and Zawacki's Introduction does the expected work of explaining how the collection comes together, presenting in plain terms a question for its audience: how is our field going to deal with the more individualized nature of graduate education, especially as it varies so widely with each institution, faculty, genre, and a



CRAIG MEDVECKY

student's own language use? Providing important interpretive moments, the editors probe the relationships between the essays, which of course is valuable in a collection where there is no single authorial voice to unify the threads. The introduction teaches us how to use the book, building excitement and anticipation for what is to come without spoiling the articles. Three themed sections follow the introduction: 1) investigates assumptions and preconceived notions about graduate writing; 2) examines the unique practice and pedagogy of graduate tutoring; and 3) offers practical ideas for expanding the role of the writing center.

The editors position Part I, "Revising Our Core Assumptions," as work intended to "situate support for graduate writers within much rehearsed writing center arguments for effective pedagogies and practices for what has traditionally been undergraduate clientele" (17). Appropriately, Pemberton begins the discussion with an essay that updates the conclusions of his 1995 article, "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center/Graduate Student Connection." Pemberton points out that graduate students are expected to write like experts in their home discipline, whereas undergraduates are not. In general, the essay sets a good foundation for the collection, helping readers to carefully consider the fundamental differences between graduate and undergraduate writing needs in the context of the writing center. Pemberton creates a sense of urgency by demonstrating that we are facing a difficult issue in supporting graduate writers, and his work is followed nicely by Sarah Summers who provides historical context for the field, preparing readers to more carefully consider the specific disciplinary support structures that follow.

While these initial essays connect to the theme of peerness through the lens of disciplinarity, the next two broaden to explore how linguistic diversity complicates our notions of expertise. Subsequently, Joan Turner discusses demand for proofreading services among multilingual graduate students in the U.K. Rather subtly, her work addresses a challenge for those designing services to meet the specific needs of grads. Namely, who negotiates the shape of those needs? The students themselves, the faculty, the administration, or the writing center? Conflicting missions here can create a tension that can quickly place the writing center in a "third space" of opposition to other voices clamoring for a service—whether that is the demand to meet the perceived need for a single linguistic standard of excellence or some other form of outsourced support. Steve Simpson in his essay shows how the history of these conversations about correctness have led many schools to combine services for L1 and L2 students in order to focus on a

shared need as opposed to points of difference. However, even as he notes his support for combined services, he also cautions us not to overlook difference but to carefully consider how the combined service model shapes the training and support structures of the writing center. Specifically, he speaks to the issue of proofreading, suggesting that this tension can be mitigated if the writing center avoids positioning itself solely around thesis and dissertation support for grads by “talk[ing] to multilingual students and advisors about the writing center being a useful resource” throughout the degree program (79). Simpson also advocates for partnerships with advising and grad faculty as a means to shift campus thinking away from the idea of the center as simply a place to outsource support. Of course, these can easily turn into difficult conversations if they become battlegrounds over who gets to determine what’s best for the students.

Given that I do a lot of work with graduate tutor education and tutor graduate students as well, any book that claims graduate tutoring is different than undergraduate tutoring has to bring these specific differences to light in a practical way in order for me to feel that it is worth my investment in time and energy. I found this concern addressed in “Part II: Reshaping our Pedagogies and Practices.” In particular, my interest began to peak with Michelle Cox’s essay, a critical examination of assumptions about higher-order and lower-order concerns (HOCs and LOCs) that explains how word choice and other lower-order concerns in graduate writing may actually be the key to unlocking the complex understanding that produces logical organization and critical argument. Cox focuses on preparing graduate tutors to work with multilingual writers. She details an approach rooted in noticing the concepts of hypotheses and output hypotheses that emphasizes careful attention to language forms. While her focus is providing support for multilingual writers, she also realizes the applicability of this method for all graduate writers to the extent that disciplinary discourse may have some of the same characteristics of a non-native language. Cox suggests that when academic or specialized language impedes the clear flow of thoughts, tutors can use the move of ‘noticing’ language at the line level to help writers clarify larger ideas. This raises critical questions about the applicability of the old saw that higher order concerns must be addressed before lower order concerns. Since the article emphasizes training protocols and education for tutors, there is substantial space dedicated to the challenge of teaching tutors to work productively with line-level language.

Reading Cox’s work, I was immersed in interesting new ideas with a critically engaged author directly working to figure out how

graduate tutoring is different from undergraduate tutoring. In fact, the entire pedagogy and practice section sustained this feeling, and I think the book would be a worthwhile purchase for this section alone. The highlight, for me, was Elena Kallestinova's essay, which sets a standard for research-based articles in writing center studies. At first, I thought the article was going to explain how to encourage graduate writers to pre-read, but the pre-reading here is for the tutor—as in “email us your paper ahead of time.” Pre-reading is something many grad tutors ask for. And staunchly, we have long pushed back on this request because it seems to encourage a view of the center as a fix-it shop. In the early days of online tutoring, asynchronous models worked with this notion, and many of us found that it was very difficult to start a conversation with a grad student asynchronously or to do the kind of HOCs and LOCs work that Cox talks about with multilingual students. But Kallestinova makes a convincing case with a substantial, multi-year, mixed methods RAD study. The bulk of the essay is spent, as we would expect scientific essays to be spent, interpreting the data collected during the study, not simply theorizing a problem. This is the kind of work that writing center studies has turned toward, led by Dana Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue, and Kallestinova's article here is a realization of that shift.

Spending time with this collection rewards a reader because the articles play off one another well. There are a variety of styles and approaches, but many of the ideas are thematically consistent, leading to an interplay of perspectives. For example, Patrick S. Lawrence et al. propose a new practice: expanded intake consultations for grad students. The authors explore required, extended in-take interviews as a way to set graduate student expectations and tackle the disciplinarity issue. The in-take interview is an interesting practice to consider, and it might help centers achieve more buy-in from dissertators who need a longer-term relationship with the writing center. The in-take interview also gives staff an opportunity to explain writing center pedagogy to new grad students and clear up notions of tutors as editors or writing centers as fix-it shops—assumptions that now seem more prevalent in grad students than they do with undergrads—and as a result this practice might pair quite well with Kallestinova's idea of pre-reading. Lawrence et al. work with a very limited sample—a small school with a center that emphasizes serving dissertators—but they offer an essay of ideas. They could end up being far afield or their practices could one day become commonplace; we don't know yet. In this case, the authors are still generating ideas and pushing them forward, trying to get to the point where we can study them more rigorously. In that sense, the book offers a number of

different kinds of reading experiences.

Along these lines, I also appreciated the fact that STEM writing—often a mystery to humanities-based writing center staff—takes the focus of two pieces, one by Juliann Reineke et al. and the other by Simpson. Reineke et al. look at how tutors with a humanities background can help STEM writers, harkening back to Heather Blaine Voorhies in that they are teaching tutors to analyze genre in order to raise the formal awareness of the writer and the tutor. While the authors don't detail a replicable and data-driven experiment, they do invest a lot of energy in providing a detailed outline of their methods and curriculum for preparing tutors to work. They also give many examples of what it could look like in practice. So as with Lawrence et al., we see another opportunity for more systematic study.

The collection also takes up the banner of the lonely dissertator and offers several pieces on dissertation support. Part III, "Expanding the Center," features articles that generally discuss supporting graduate theses and dissertations and creating external partnerships to help meet this challenge. Here, Laura Brady et al. share the history of their center as a model for thinking about using WAC/WID partnerships to improve support for advanced graduate writing. While their campus is a WAC campus, they detail a lengthy WID survey/outreach process that the writing center conducted with departments, faculty, and graduate students to assess and meet the need for support. The WID partnerships aim to bridge the gap between faculty and tutors, and in that area they introduce the idea of "discipline and assignment-specific tutoring tools" (DATTs). These DATTs are printed materials "collaboratively used by tutors and disciplinary faculty" in order to make it easier for writers to break down "the task and the strategies used to negotiate the actual writing of the assignment" (Dinitz and Harrington as qtd in Brady et al. 193). While the article provided a list of readings for tutors, it would have been helpful to include some examples of these DATTs as they pertain to dissertation and thesis support. Of course, the work in developing these resources relies on faculty collaboration with the writing center, but if successful, this type of partnership could provide a very tangible and powerful example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to graduate writing support.

Other essays in Part III wrestle with the question of how to present writing to grads as a process, and not a product of their professional identity, the culmination of which is the dissertation. Marilyn Gray asks programs to consider student well-being and professional development in graduate writing assignments. She points out that

a great deal of graduate writing happens outside the structure of a class: fellowship essays, conference papers, presentations, personal statements, articles for publication and the like—all are essential writings that enhance professional identity and feed the dissertation. This seems to be a sensible and foundational way of thinking about dissertations; rather than placing them in some far-away, isolated world reserved for boot camps, Gray urges writing centers to show grads how lower-stakes writing creates identity. Elizabeth Lenaghan builds on this concept. Her article positions writing as a process of discovering one's professional identity. Lenaghan argues that framing the issue of graduate writing support in terms of retention and completion pushes our response toward a view of writing as product. Instead, Lenaghan wants to pull the writing center back to the benefits of a process-oriented approach and offers a fellows program as a model of peer engagement, promoting more mentorship among grads. Both of these articles extend Mary Jane Curry's work, "More Than Language: Graduate Student Writing as 'Disciplinary Becoming'" in *Supporting Graduate Student Writers*.

On the whole, *Re/Writing the Center* offers both clear and compelling problem definitions, a healthy amount of RAD research, and a look at some innovative approaches to existing issues of graduate writing support. This collection proceeds from the notion that graduate writing centers must start with the body of knowledge acquired from the undergraduate center and modify it, re-write it. That is one view. On the other hand, if you see graduate writing support as substantially different from undergraduate support—a claim made by many—then it might also make sense to start talking about the graduate writing support as its own separate field as opposed to an offshoot of undergraduate peer tutoring.

Of course, I understand that people respond well to the notion of "re-writing" or "re-thinking." But I come back to Pemberton, who states "the crux of the problem" for both graduate students and writing centers is that despite a clear need for grad-level writing assistance, most writing centers "are not structured or staffed in ways that will allow them to provide discipline-specific writing assistance relevant to advanced graduate students in a wide variety of professional discourse communities" (34). In a way, this is a troubling observation that couples with Pemberton's sense that "specific answers will always depend on local circumstances and contexts"; and further, that "[l]ocations, funding, institutional histories, and perceived needs vary widely and resist any one-recommendation-fits-all-answer" (36). Now, you might argue that Pemberton is only talking about centers staffed by undergraduate tutors, but I think what he



has to say applies to graduate writing centers staffed by graduate tutors as well. We have seen other researchers say as much in this very collection. Brady et al. offer a center narrative that illustrates both direct acceptance of these challenges and a way of meeting them head on. From my perspective, I have read enough recent literature to at least consider the possibility that the problem of graduate writing support not only is different from undergraduate peer tutoring, but graduate writers may also require more than just the writing center, stand alone or not. Perhaps supporting graduate writers requires other offices on the university campus working in concert with the writing center to do the job adequately. In this collection in particular, we hear Gillespie and Pemberton advocate for partnerships with others outside the writing center and across campus, just as many of the articles incorporate avenues of partnership into their own unique and original solutions for the problems of graduate writing support presented by their own institutional contexts. Placing this collection within view of other recent scholarship then, I think graduate writing support has started to cut ties with the undergraduate writing center. That gives the work a sense of urgency. We have a problem and a purpose that is all our own. If best practices in the graduate writing center are different (more diverse and more varied than our undergraduate centers) and collaboration is the way we deal with that difference, then perhaps we need to explore and study these partnerships more. This collection is certainly a first step in that direction.



## WORKS CITED

- Curry, Mary Jane. "More Than Language: Graduate Student Writing as 'Disciplinary Becoming.'" *Supporting Graduate Student Writers: Research, Curriculum, and Program Design*, edited by Steven Simpson, et al., pp.78-96.
- Pemberton, Michael. "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center Connection." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 116-33.
- Simpson, Steve, et al. *Supporting Graduate Student Writers: Research, Curriculum, and Program Design*. U of Michigan P, 2016.
- Voorhies, Heather Blain. "Building Professional Scholars: The Writing Center at the Graduate Level." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 39, no. 5-6, 2015, pp. 6-9.

# Tutors' Column: "Forms of Magic: Navigating Chaos as a Tutor in Training"

Gaelen Hall  
College of the Atlantic



Throughout my time as a tutor in training, I have been exposed to many methods, techniques, and heuristics for working with students. From directive and non-directive approaches, to scaffolding, to nutshelling, the literature has a wealth of tips and tricks for the one-to-one conference. However, tutors are not always told exactly how to decide which techniques are most appropriate for any particular student or situation.

When I first arrived in the writing center, I felt that the other tutors were practicing forms of magic. They all seemed confident about how to approach each session, as if the connection between theory and practice were self-evident. As I worked with more students and moved through the college's tutor-training program, I gained some of that confidence but then quickly lost it when I began an independent study focused on writing tutoring. The writing center literature presented me with exponentially more approaches than I had already studied and left me, once more, deeply insecure about the choices I was making. Faced with such a wide variety of possible methods, I felt like a brand-new tutor again, questioning whether there might have been a better approach for a given session or student. As a result, when a student, who I will call Jenny, brought in a paper one afternoon with extensive corrections and a request from her professor to go over them with me, I saw numerous possibilities but did not trust myself to choose one.

The particular session I am referring to was not scheduled through the writing center. I was the designated tutor for an introductory writing course, and Jenny was one of the students I met with weekly throughout the term. Introductory Writing is a required, "remedial" course for incoming freshmen with "weak" writing skills. This course description introduced a slightly punitive undertone, one which I was constantly trying to combat in my interactions with students. I tried to give Jenny as much agency in our sessions as possible, as I do in my normal role as a tutor; however, I also

felt some responsibility toward the professor and his agenda for the class. Just as the course was mandatory, so were the sessions themselves; each student was required to meet weekly with either the professor or me. This method further reduced the students' agency, which made me, as a tutor, feel even more uncomfortable. Despite the unusual conditions, I had worked hard throughout the term to develop the same atmosphere that I strive for in my regular writing center sessions, and felt I had succeeded to a degree. Shifting the agency to Jenny as much as I could had helped me to keep our sessions as pleasant and productive as possible.

On this particular afternoon, when Jenny arrived for our weekly conference and produced a paper covered with suggested revisions, I was deeply conflicted. She seemed unhappy about the corrections and did not want to go over them but also needed my help to interpret comments and make suggested changes. By accepting the professor's request, I risked reinforcing the punitive, "fix-it" undertone that I had worked so hard to dispel. I would have much preferred to focus on the content instead, reminding Jenny of her own agency in the writing process, and then use that motivation to tackle the grammar, but we did not have time. Caught between the professor's request, Jenny's reluctant needs, and my own high hopes, I could not figure out how to approach the session. I sat at the table, trying to chat with Jenny while masking my frustration and weighing my options. Finally, frustrated and overwhelmed, I made a decision. With a small sigh of resignation, I put my head down and slogged through the laundry list of corrections, allowing the professor's comments to control the agenda.

After the session ended, I was frustrated—with the professor for limiting my options and with myself for not handling the situation differently. I had spent weeks immersed in writing tutor literature, being told that we are "not the writer's coauthor" (McAndrew and Reigstad 19) and "it is not [the tutor's] responsibility to correct the paper line by line" (Fischer and Murray as qtd. in Harris 30). Based on these readings, I was convinced I had made the wrong decision. There had to be a method that could have helped me better navigate the conference, but it was not clear to me what that method was.

Returning to my independent study, I read literature, reached out to writing center professionals, and talked with my fellow tutors, hoping to uncover the elusive method that I had been missing in my conference with Jenny. However, my research and reflection slowly revealed that there was no "right" answer that applied directly to my particular situation. My struggle had not been the result of inadequate training, but rather the product of a particularly

complex session. I realized that none of my previous meetings had been so fraught with power dynamics and conflicting agendas; consequently, I had never had to make difficult decisions about how to guide a given conference. My previous confidence as a tutor had been established in relatively straight-forward conditions, whereas the meeting with Jenny directly challenged my ability to balance the conflicting priorities that the student, professor, and I brought to the conference.

After searching desperately for one “correct” approach, I have now realized that success in complex sessions is not about knowing a technique; it is about trusting my instincts. Despite all the resources I have encountered during my training as a writing tutor, the only tools I use in every single session are the instincts I have honed through my training. No piece of literature, no specific technique or approach applies exactly to the session I am in. Every meeting presents unique variables and challenges. Even now, after my independent study—which equipped me with many specific, practical skills—I still find myself improvising, adapting to new situations using a combination of techniques, experience, and experimentation. My success depends on my ability to not just tolerate but embrace the “chaos of tutoring writing” (McAndrew and Reigstad 27). But to realize this, I had to let go of the notion that there was a right and a wrong approach and trust myself to instinctively guide each session.

The perfect solution is a myth, and the tutor’s instincts are essential. That simple concept allowed me to stop judging my choices in the meeting with Jenny and review the whole experience. It was clear just how detrimental my rigid view had been; as soon as I had decided that my training was inadequate and my subsequent decisions had been wrong, I then assumed the whole session was a loss. But looking back on it, I realized I had actually made a reasonable decision given the difficulties I was facing. While we focused on the professor’s comments—which deeply contradicted my tutoring sensibilities—going through them together, I had done my best to explain to Jenny the reasoning behind the comments, demystifying them for her and helping her see them in the larger context of writing. In doing so, I had tried to show my recognition of and respect for her as a fellow writer.

My struggle to find a middle ground—one that respected the professor’s request and served Jenny’s needs while offering her agency and authority—had paid off in the final minutes of the session. As we were wrapping up, Jenny paused for a moment and asked me, “What is the first thing you think about when you start writing?” Questions like these—which show a genuine interest

in the writer and the writing process—are my favorite, and what followed was an inspiring and amiable conversation about the impetus of writing. Despite the somewhat dreary work of our session, Jenny had seemed grateful and in good spirits on her way out the door.

My shift from a rigid approach to tutoring—which privileged the literature as the final authority—to a more dynamic one which privileges the tutor and their instincts has significantly changed my experience of the one-to-one conference. Rather than dreading the “chaos,” which can be truly difficult to navigate, I look forward to it, celebrating it as the unique privilege of being a writing tutor. While this role can often be difficult, even discouraging, its unpredictability also allows for questions like Jenny’s—moments where the student learns something specific and personalized about their writing or themselves. To foster those moments, we must move toward the “chaos” by questioning simplistic approaches, embracing complex power dynamics, staying sensitive and open, and most of all trusting our instinctual ability to improvise—using our knowledge of the literature, our past experiences, and our commitment to address students’ needs.



## **WORKS CITED**

- Harris, Muriel. *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1986.
- McAndrew, Donald A., and Thomas J. Reigstad. *Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences*. Boynton/Cook, 2001.

## Conference Announcements

### Southeastern Writing Centers Association

**February 11-13, 2021**

Online Conference

*“Trauma and Transformation: Writing Centers in an Era of Change”*

For details of the conference and a link to submitting a proposal, go to: [southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org/conference](http://southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot.org/conference). For questions, contact the SWCA President, Janine Morris: [jmorris@nova.edu](mailto:jmorris@nova.edu).

### Secondary School Writing Centers Association

**March 12-19, 2021**

Virtual Conference

*“From Crisis to Creation”*

See the conference website for the proposal form and other conference information: [sswca.org/conference/sswca-2021-virtual-from-crisis-to-creation/](http://sswca.org/conference/sswca-2021-virtual-from-crisis-to-creation/). Please email conference co-chairs Stacey Hahn, Jenny Goransson, and Vivian Blair at [sswca.board@gmail.com](mailto:sswca.board@gmail.com) with any questions about presentations.

### South Central Writing Centers Association

**March 5-7, 2021**

Virtual conference

Hosted by Southwestern University and Abilene Christian University  
*“Collaboration, Confidence, and Compromise: The Interrelational Work of Writing Centers”*

Keynotes: Scott Widdon and Rusty Carpenter

Conference website: [scwca.net/scwca-conference-2021](http://scwca.net/scwca-conference-2021).

Conference chairs: Jennifer Marciniak: [marcini@southwestern.edu](mailto:marcini@southwestern.edu); and Cole Bennett: [cole.bennett@acu.edu](mailto:cole.bennett@acu.edu).



## ***WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship***

***WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship***, published bi-monthly, from September to June, is a peer-reviewed publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC. Material can not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. Proper acknowledgment of title, author, and publication date should be included.

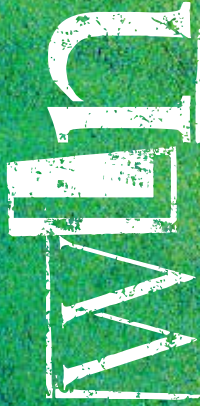
Editor: **Muriel Harris** (harrism@purdue.edu)  
Blog Editor: **Anna Sophia Habib** (ahabib@gmu.edu)

### **Managed and Produced by**

TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC under agreement with  
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC  
52 Riley Road #380, Celebration, FL 34747  
(866) 556-1743  
[www.wlnjournal.org](http://www.wlnjournal.org)  
[support@wlnjournal.org](mailto:support@wlnjournal.org)

### **Subscriptions, Archives, Resources, and Manuscript Submissions:**

Visit [www.wlnjournal.org](http://www.wlnjournal.org) for subscription information, free archive access, resources, and manuscript submission guidelines.



A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship  
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC.  
52 Riley Road #380  
Celebration, FL 34747

PRSR STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
ORLANDO, FL  
PERMIT 3172



winjournal



WLNjournal